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THE UNDP AND UNFPA PROGRAMMING PROCESS: PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING DECISION 2001/11

Report of the Administrator and the Executive Director

I. BACKGROUND

1. This report is submitted to the Executive Board in response to its decision 2001/11 of 22 June 2001, on the UNDP/UNFPA programming process.

2. During the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNDP/UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) held on 6 June 2003, UNDP and UNFPA, together with UNICEF and WFP, reported to the Executive Board, in response to paragraph 8 of decision 2001/11, on common tools to monitor progress and evaluate outcomes/results of country programmes, in order to further harmonize and standardize the programming process. During the joint meeting, the four organizations explained their approach to monitoring and evaluating the outcomes and outputs of their individual country programmes, agreeing to focus future monitoring and evaluation activities around the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) results matrix.

3. Decision 2001/11 was adopted on the basis of a report (DP/2001/12 - DP/FPA/2001/7) submitted to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board at its annual session 2001. That report, in turn, had been submitted to the Board in response to its decision 2000/12 of 16 June 2000, which requested UNFPA to propose to the other members of the United Nations Development Group

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(UNDG), the establishment of a working group to develop a common programme approval process, and to report to the Executive Board at its annual session 2001 on progress and future options in the programming process.

4. In report DP/2001/12 - DP/FPA/2001/7, UNDP and UNFPA proposed that the Executive Board approve a programming option whereby UNDP and UNFPA would submit draft country programme outlines to the UNDP/UNFPA Executive Board for discussion, prior to finalizing the programme documents. The Board would then approve the programme and the proposed resource allocation and would authorize the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNFPA to finalize the country programmes, taking into account the comments made by the Board.

5. In decision 2001/11, the Executive Board modified this two-step approval process as follows: (a) draft country programme outlines would be presented to the Executive Board for discussion at their annual sessions, and where applicable, the common country assessment (CCA) and the UNDAF would be made available for information; (b) the Executive Board would review the draft country programme outlines, after which the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNFPA would assist Governments in finalizing the country programmes, taking into account comments made by the Board; and (c) the country programmes would be posted by October of the last year of the country programme on the web sites of the respective UNDG partners and would be approved in January on a no-objection basis without presentation or discussion, unless at least five members had informed the secretariat in writing before the meeting of their wish to bring a particular country programme before the Executive Board.

6. In paragraph 11 of decision 2001/11, the Executive Board requested the Administrator and the Executive Director to report to the Executive Board at its annual session 2004 on progress in implementing decision 2001/11. This report is in response to that request.

II. FIRST STEP: A HARMONIZED FORMAT

7. Following the adoption of decision 2001/11, UNDP and UNFPA, with the participation of UNICEF and WFP, convened a small working group to develop a harmonized format for country programme outlines and country programme documents. UNDP and UNFPA agreed on a harmonized format, and in November 2001, the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNFPA co-signed a letter to all UNDP Resident Representatives and UNFPA Representatives, attaching the new format. The Executive Boards of UNICEF and WFP adopted a similar process in 2002.

8. The harmonized format aimed to formulate country programme outlines that were brief, concise and focused. The narrative portion of the outline was limited to four to five pages. UNDP Resident Representatives and UNFPA Representatives were urged to ensure that country

programmes focused on achieving concrete results and had clearly defined strategies. To facilitate this, a results and resources framework was required for each country programme outline. The results and resources framework indicates the outcomes and outputs the programmes are expected to achieve and the resources needed to achieve them.

9. Since 2002, all country programme outlines presented by UNDP and UNFPA to the Executive Board for review and approval have followed the harmonized format. To date, UNDP has presented, and the Executive Board has approved, 44 country (or multi-country) programmes under the harmonized programme approval process and the harmonized format. Similarly, UNFPA has presented, and the Executive Board has approved, 38 such programmes under the harmonized programme approval process and the harmonized format.

10. The country offices that employed the new format found it to be very user-friendly and helpful in developing more concise, focused and strategic country programmes. At the same time, it was recognized that harmonizing the programme approval process alone would not in itself lead to increase collaboration and coordination among the UNDG Executive Committee agencies in developing their individual programmes. Other elements in the programming process, such as ongoing efforts to improve the quality of CCAs and UNDAFs, needed to be considered. During the initial stages of the harmonized programme approval process, the link between UNDAF objectives and individual programme outputs was not always clear. In addition, linking resources to specific outputs in the results and resources framework required further development.

III. FURTHER HARMONIZATION OF PROGRAMMING PROCEDURES

11. Decision 2001/11 on the harmonized approval process proved to be one of the driving forces for increased United Nations reform initiatives. In December 2001, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 56/201, calling upon the funds, programmes and the specialized agencies of the United Nations system to examine ways to further simplify their rules and procedures and to accord high priority to the issue of simplification and harmonization. The organizations were requested to take concrete steps in the following areas: (a) decentralization and delegation of authority; (b) financial regulations; (c) procedures for implementing programmes and projects and, in particular, requirements in terms of monitoring and reporting; (d) common shared services at country offices; and (e) recruitment, training and remuneration of national project personnel.

12. With the development and introduction of simplified and harmonized tools that emerged from the simplification and harmonization process, new terminology was also introduced. Terms such as *draft country outlines* and *country programmes*, which were introduced in decision 2001/11, were replaced by *country programme document (CPD)*. Draft versions of the CPDs are presented to the Executive Board during its annual session for discussion and review; the

Executive Board then approves the final version of the CPDs at the first regular session of the subsequent year.

13. With the introduction of the UNDAF results matrix in 2003, the CPD results and resource framework also required adjustment, in order to align it with the UNDAF results matrix. The introduction of the UNDAF results matrix facilitates the linkages between the goals, outcomes and outputs of country programmes and the UNDAF outcomes. As a result, CCAs and UNDAFs are driving country programming processes more and more. At the same time, the CCAs and UNDAFs are themselves being driven by and integrated into national development planning processes.

14. Did the harmonized formulation and approval process lead to increased collaboration and coordination among UNDG Executive Committee agencies in developing their individual programmes? Certainly in the CCA/UNDAF rollout countries, collaboration has markedly improved among United Nations agencies, in particular among the UNDG Executive Committee agencies during the development of their respective country programmes.

15. From the responses received from country offices about the new process, staff seem pleased with the decision to have a more focused document which links resources and outputs to UNDAF outcomes, thereby anchoring the UNDP and UNFPA country programmes directly to UNDAF objectives and national priorities. Country office staff also seem pleased to have a document that links resources to outputs, and one that makes the CCA and UNDAF key steps in the process. Many staff also feel that the harmonized approval process provides better opportunities for synergies with partner agencies of the United Nations. The 2003 revised CCA and UNDAF guidelines and the UNDAF results matrix are expected to further facilitate the transition from UNDAF to country programmes.

16. Country office staff members have, however, expressed the concern that, with the introduction of the two-step approval process, the timeframe for developing country programmes has increased. Since the CCA and UNDAF are now mandatory steps in the country programming process, the process now takes approximately 18-24 months, between the initial analysis and the commencement of a new country programme. There is a general concern that the time lag of almost two years between the CCA situation analysis and the implementation of the country programme could affect the relevance of country programmes, as country situations may have changed in the interim period, warranting a revision of the analysis and an adjustment in the thrust of the programme. UNDP and UNFPA will work with their partners in the UNDG to address this concern.

17. A second concern is that the current process may not be flexible enough. This refers to having to submit draft country programme documents to the annual session of the Executive Board in June and the approval of such programmes at the first regular session the following January. At a time when United Nations agencies as well as multilateral and bilateral donors are

encouraged to align their programmes as much as possible to national planning processes, the Executive Board may wish to consider the possibility of reviewing and approving country programme documents during any of the three sessions in a given year.

IV. RECOMMENDATION

18. **The Executive Board may wish to take note of the present report (DP/2004/29 - DP/FPA/2004/7).**